

IV. Economic Development

Economic development in the South Valley has always been defined by Isleta Boulevard, and today that legacy continues. Isleta Boulevard functions as the economic and social corridor of the Valley: a place to shop, to eat, to run into neighbors, and to work. The Isleta corridor economy was established first by agriculture, and later by a vibrant small businesses community. Together, agriculture and this small business sensibility have served as the backbone of the community's economy and shaped its sense of place.

Given the significant population growth and economic change in the South Valley today, Isleta Boulevard's rich character and economic vitality are now vulnerable. Declining agriculture and an increase in suburbanization have paved the way for development that turns its back on local history and creates a sense of "placelessness." Today, the corridor is home to some national chains that operate at the expense of truly local economic development that will add both to the local economy and to local character.

Yet opportunity exists: Unlike many of the suburbs being built on the Westside that offer newer infrastructure and cheaper housing, the South Valley still supplies an element of uniqueness and history, both of which have increasing value in an increasingly homogeneous commercial world. In a time when globalization has spawned a "geography of nowhere," the ultimate irony is that *place* now matters more than ever.

This means that the ability to develop *smart*, with development that supports local markets and honors local uniqueness, is vital to the Valley's economic future. Throughout this planning process, meeting participants felt that community economic development goals are to:

- Increase retail and services for local residents
- Build the image of the Isleta corridor as a regional destination without turning into a tourist commodity
- Improve upon existing historical character with restored buildings, culturally-significant businesses, and pedestrian amenities

In order to increase the economic vitality of the South Valley for local businesses and a better circulation of local dollars, a comprehensive approach of social, programmatic, and zoning issues must be undertaken. Unfortunately, many of these issues are outside the scope of this sector plan. However, the important policy issues that were articulated by the community have been included here for future discussion, including small business support and historical building re-use.

The scope of this sector plan pertains mostly to zoning. Therefore, as one of four new zones introduced in this sector plan, the Isleta Boulevard Mixed-Use Zone (M-U) is presented here.



Local businesses along the Isleta corridor



A. ISLETA BOULEVARD MIXED-USE ZONE (M-U)

The idea of mixed-use development is not new to Isleta Boulevard; it lies in its history. Land uses along Isleta have historically been an eclectic mesh of housing and commercial coexisting side by side. It is one of the many elements of the area's unique character. Community members have articulated a need for zoning that allows a mix of land uses along the corridor, which since World War II have tended to be separated by mutually exclusive zoning districts.

Currently, there is a mismatch between historic land use development and current zoning policy. Despite historic land patterns in the Valley, the "modern" separation of uses is seen along Isleta Boulevard's small parcels, many of which were split into two and zoned C-1 along Isleta and R-1 in the back. In many cases, the C-1 parcel is very small, limiting its development potential. Although a single person might own both the C-1 and R-1 portions of a parcel, that owner is unable to create a complementary use between them.

The best thing that could happen to Isleta would be:

"That it retain its small business ambience and encourage storefront businesses with apartments or homes on the second floor."

- Resident response from a survey administered during the 9/21/04 public meeting

Mixed-use is actually a departure from traditional zoning to the extent that it encourages a combination of land uses that might normally be regarded as incompatible. The intent of this zone is to create self-sustaining areas within the community that complement its history, enabling residents to walk to work, retail, transit, and recreational facilities. Pedestrian accessibility is key in the Mixed-Use Zone, as is community. Mixed-use development

can facilitate interaction among people, cultivating a sense of community and place.

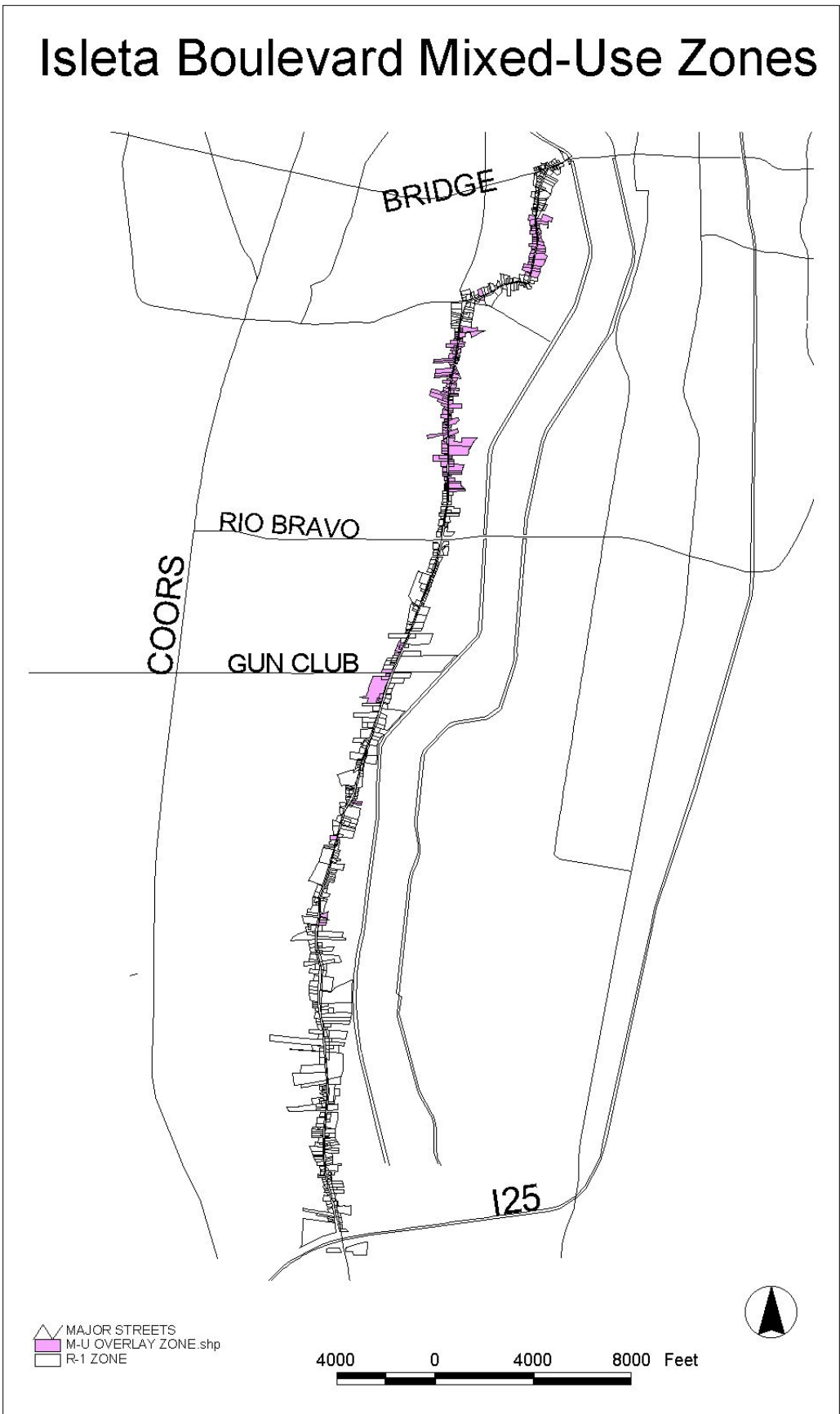
The goals of the Mixed-Use Overlay Zone include:

- Encouraging well-designed and functional mixed-use areas, which meet the needs of the local communities
- Promoting residential uses as a vital and integral component of these mixed use zones and encouraging residences to locate on top of or behind commercial uses
- Protecting and enhancing the neighborhood and the existing streetscape through appropriate design measures that ensure aspects such as privacy and solar access
- Ensuring appropriate placement of commercial uses without adversely impacting nearby residential uses
- Safely moving vehicular and pedestrian traffic while limiting adverse effects of parking on adjoining residential neighborhoods

M-U Applicability

Areas eligible for the M-U zone include parcels along the corridor that are currently zoned C-1 or R-1 between Village Centers. The M-U zone will not automatically replace current zoning along Isleta Boulevard; rather, property owners can request that their zoning be changed. Property owners might request M-U for a number of reasons, including:

- With current zoning, many C-1 parcels are too small for most development
- Zoning consistency of their parcels



The complete language of the Isleta Boulevard Mixed-Use Zone can be found in Chapter 8, Section 4 of this Sector Plan. The table below provides policy for development standards in the M-U zone:

Isleta Boulevard Mixed-Use (M-U) Zone Policy Overview	
Scale	<p><i>Maintain traditional building scale with:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maximum of 3,500 sq ft footprint for new stand-alone buildings (residential, commercial, or mixed-use) <p style="text-align: center;"><u>or</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7,000 sq ft footprint for new buildings with 30 foot maximum width of establishment and façade variation (adjoining commercial, affordable housing, or mixed-use with affordable housing)
Setback	<p><i>Maintain traditional setback and define the corridor with:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 20' maximum front setback to define corridor and conform with traditional patterns <p style="text-align: center;"><u>or</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 30' maximum for eating establishments providing outdoor seating in front
Design	<p><i>Maintain traditional architectural forms and promote the corridor's unique sense of place with:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choice of 4 or 5 traditional architectural styles as defined in the sector plan - Incorporate some redesign strategies for the park at Dead Man's Curve (additional shade and landscaping, etc.) - No corporate franchise architecture - No drive-through establishments
Parking	See Parking Guidelines under Design Overlay Zone
Landscaping	See Landscaping Guidelines under Design Overlay Zone
Drainage	Drainage must be treated on site. Drainage infrastructure will be chosen from a menu of options in the sector plan.
Height	Height limit is 26 feet (roughly two stories), consistent with current regulations.
Lighting	See Lighting Guidelines under Design Overlay Zone
Signage	See Signage Guidelines under Design Overlay Zone

B. SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS

Isleta Boulevard enjoys a long history of fostering locally-owned small businesses. Local residents value these small businesses, realizing that as locals, these business owners naturally maintain a far greater sense of loyalty and investment toward local patrons and the surrounding community. Supporting small business enterprises helps ensure that business profit is recycled back into the local economy and honors the corridor's rich history of locally-owned businesses.

Steps Toward Increasing Small Business Support

- Develop small-scale commercial centers for merchants contributing to local character in favor of superstores run by national corporations
- Provide incentives for small businesses like tax abatements and preferential licensing
- Strive for niche markets like value-added agricultural processing and cold storage

- Utilize the new South Valley Economic Development Center incubator and the wide variety of small business services it will provide
- Formalize the link between small farms and the incubator's commercial kitchen
- Provide incentives for local hiring practices
- Utilize funding streams such as upper Isleta's Metropolitan Redevelopment Area status (administered by the City of Albuquerque) and the MainStreets organization

C. HISTORIC RE-USE

In addition to preserving the character of the corridor through the strategic placement of new development, the re-use of existing historic structures is an important element to future Isleta corridor economic development.

Assisting local businesses with financing to renovate original building facades would help maintain the historic culture of the community while attracting customers to existing businesses. Identifying funding sources (such as the MainStreets façade program) and the organizing to request funding is the first step in implementing historically-viable economic development.

Such historic building re-use could be accomplished through the pursuit of official recognition for structures needing repair or renovation. In addition to protecting their valuable historic significance, such recognition could also contribute to their eligibility for receiving rehabilitation funding.